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Macon: an Historical Retrospect¹

MISS MARY LANE,
History Club of Macon

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Georgia Historical Society, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is fitting that we people of today should turn back the pages of history for a short while and refresh our minds and re-inspire our hearts by a study of those who have gone before. I deem it a pleasure to discuss with you past generations and past accomplishments, so I have styled my paper "Macon: An Historical Retrospect"

We will consider in this discussion only those people who are gone, but whose achievements must ever live in Macon history.

Longfellow's Songs of Hiawatha will live in American literature as long as the term Indian shall be remembered, and our illustrious Lanier who sang in Macon will live in his poems of unsurpassed beauty and loveliness as long as the Chattahoochee flows down to the sea, and the sea fills the Marshes of Glynn.

We have not changed the names the Southern Indians gave the rivers, though the plow of civilization has greatly modified the character of our streams. When De Soto crossed them, the waters were clear and sparkling. Ocmulgee means boiling or bubbling water from the number of springs along its course. Can you think of it as once like the Chattahoochee which means sparkling or bright colored rocks?

"The white quartz shone and the smooth brook stone
Did bar me of passage with friendly brawl,
And many a luminous jewel lone
Crystal clear or a cloud with mist,
Ruby, Garnet and Amethyst

¹ Presented at the eighty-second annual meeting of the Georgia Historical Society April 29, 1921.

Made lures with the lights of streaming stone."

So sings Lanier in his *Song of the Chattahoochee*. But cutting down the forest and cultivating the soil has made a muddy Ocmulgee.

None of the rivers seem to have been named when De Soto crossed them. Oglethorpe's crossing the Ocmulgee in 1738 at the site of Macon is the first mention we have found of the name Ocmulgee.

We may say with safety that De Soto was the discoverer of the Ocmulgee river; that he journeyed with his army of Spaniards along its western bank ten days. Two notable events occurred during De Soto's visit. One event was that it was in the neighborhood of this river that the first cannon was fired upon American soil, De Soto ridding himself of a burdensome piece of ordnance by firing it off to the utter amazement of the Indians. The other notable event was that the first ordinance of baptism recorded in the new world was administered in the crystal waters of the Ocmulgee in the month of March 1540, at the feet of those memorable relics of antiquity, the Indian mounds that majestically overlook the present city of Macon.

Almost every writer of Indian antiquities refers at length to these mounds East of Macon, on the old Ocmulgee fields, which contain some of the most remarkable tumuli in America. In 1774, Mr. William Bartram, a celebrated English botanist and historian, who spent several years among the Indians in the South, published the following account of his travels: "After crossing the Oconee, a day's journey brought us to the Ocmulgee, the main branch of the beautiful Altamaha. On the east bank of the river lie the famous 'Old Ocmulgee Fields' where are yet conspicuous very wonderful remains of the power and grandeur of the ancients of this part of America, in the ruins of a capital town and settlement of vast artificial hills and terraces. These old fields and planting land extend fifteen or twenty miles along the rich lowlands of the river. If we are to give credit to the account the Creeks give of themselves, this place is remarkable for being the

first town or settlement, when they sat down (as they term it) or established themselves after their emigration from the West, beyond the Mississippi; their original native country. They afterward gradually subdued their surrounding enemies, strengthening themselves by taking the vanquished tribes into the Confederacy."

The Creeks did not claim these tumuli were erected by their tribe. They declared that they were here when their ancestors first possessed themselves of the region. On making excavations for the Central of Georgia Railway, the engineers found some very remarkable flat skulls in the lowest strata. Who these flat-head mound-builders were is conjectural. Possibly, they were a colony of the Natchez journeying hither from their old habitat on the banks of the Mississippi. Certain it is that these tumuli antedate the traditions of the Creeks who were native here at the period of the English colonization.

We can look down the river from almost any of our beautiful hills of Macon on a fair day and see the eminence, formerly known as Lamar's, but now known as Brown's Mount near the river about seven miles below Macon. It is the property of Mr. Harry Stilwell Edwards, its base covering an area of three hundred acres, and on its summit there is a level area of perhaps fifteen acres.

Brown's Mount used to be a favorite pleasure resort for the early belles and beaux of the city. According to the historian, Mr. John C. Butler, "twas there in spring and summer that melody and perfume filled its groves, while dancing, singing and music of instruments enlivened its lofty summit, interspersed with many a joke as well as decanter which was cracked around the magic basin, of its crystal fountains". (More of ancient history since these have long since all dried up). It still abounds with flowers being especially noted as the habitat of the red honeysuckle and the Cherokee Rose, the latter at one time enclosing the City of Macon.

In 1785, Col. Benjamin Hawkins, originally a United

States Senator and a Revolutionary War officer who enjoyed the esteem of General Washington, was named as one of the Commissioners to negotiate with the Creek Indians. Col. Hawkins was the principal actor in all the treaties with the Creeks. Upon his recommendation to the War Department in 1802, Mr. Jefferson insisted upon the privilege of establishing a fort and trading post on the Old Ocmulgee Fields.

Though Col. Hawkins did not reside at the fort in East Macon, which bore his name and which was built for protection against the Indians, he was a frequent visitor and negotiated much of his official business at that place. All the papers and manuscripts of Col. Hawkins that were not consumed by fire when his house was burned at the Creek Agency on the Flint River were collected by Mr. I. K. Tefft of Savannah, and published in the collection of the Georgia Historical Society many years ago.

The settlement on the east bank of the Ocmulgee was known as Fort Hawkins until 1821, just a hundred years ago, when the name of Newtown was adopted. In the same year the land between the Flint and the Ocmulgee and the reserve on which Fort Hawkins stood, the remainder of the old Ocmulgee fields, was acquired by treaty, which was made at Indian Springs on January 8, and ratified March 2. On February 12, 1825, a final treaty was made at Indian Springs between Duncan G. Campbell and James Merriwether, on the part of the United States and a number of warriors and their brave chieftain, General William McIntosh, afterwards so atrociously murdered by the Indians.

On February 15, 1823, was held the first inferior court, and on March 20, the same year the honorable superior court of Bibb County met for the first time. The first presentment was against a free man of color for retailing liquor. The first indictment was for stabbing.

When Macon celebrates her first centennial in 1923 the Kiwanis Club of Macon propose to have rebuilt Fort Hawkins, as it originally stood, for an historic relic and remembrance spot that the traditions and history centering about

it may be preserved for the future.

By an act of legislature the County of Bibb was laid out and organized, also commissioners were appointed to lay off the town of Macon on the west reserve of the Ocmulgee River. The county was named in memory of Dr. William Wyatt Bibb, a Virginian, who came to Georgia to practice medicine. He afterward removed to Alabama and was governor of that State at the time of his death.

In 1828 the Fort Hawkins property embracing the original one hundred acres, was sold with the last of the reserve land and by an act of the legislature the whole reserve was surveyed and sold off into lots and Newtown was incorporated into the town of Macon, which had been named in honor of another North Carolina patriot, Col. Nathaniel Macon. The first frame house on this side of the river was built on the corner of Fifth and Ocmulgee streets.

One of the most distinguished men Macon has ever had the honor of entertaining was the Marquis de LaFayette, who visited Macon March 29, 1825. On a very recent anniversary the Mary Hammond Washington Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, commemorated this event when they unveiled a tablet of Georgia granite fittingly inscribed on the site of the Wayside Inn, the city hotel, where LaFayette was entertained during his brief visit here. Later this hotel became known as the Wayside Home, where the sick and wounded soldiers were brought from the Union Station and cared for by the women of the Confederacy.

After an excellent dinner in honor of LaFayette, this toast was given by Edward D. Tracy, Esq: "Our illustrious guest, the friend of our country, of liberty and of man." To which the General replied and gave: "The town of Macon: May its prosperity continue to be one of the strongest arguments in favor of republican institutions."

This account was obtained from an old copy of the Georgia Messenger, a pioneer sheet whose first paper was issued March 16, 1823. The Messenger was established by Major Matthew Robertson and later flowered into the Macon Tel-

egraph. The Telegraph was established in December 1826 by Dr. Myrom Bartlett who was editor and proprietor until 1844 when he was succeeded by Oliver H. Prince, a celebrated humorist. In 1855, the paper was sold to Joseph Clisby who soon after commenced publication of the Macon Daily Telegraph, which continues at this time. In November 1869 the Journal and Messenger was purchased from the J. W. Burke Company, A. W. Reese becoming a partner and an editor. The firm was then known as Clisby, Jones & Reese. The venerable senior editor, Mr. Clisby, was the acknowledged Nestor of the press of Georgia. The paper came under the control of Major J. F. Hanson in 1879. Col. Charles R. Pendleton was the editor and publisher of the Telegraph from 1896 to 1914. His name still heads the editorial column and his fame will live as long as the Telegraph, to which is due much of the growth and prosperity of Macon.

The Macon Volunteers were organized April 23, 1825. This was the first military organization to respond to the call of Georgia for service, going against the Seminoles in Florida in 1836, also the Creeks later on in the same year when forty-four Georgia companies sprang up and responded. Large numbers of militiamen went to fight for the liberation of Texas from the Mexican in 1836. Within twenty-five miles of Macon, at Knoxville in Crawford County, was made the first flag of the State of Texas, containing the lone star emblem presented to a company of Georgia volunteers, organized to go to the assistance of Texas in her struggle for the independence of Mexico.

Every Fourth of July has been celebrated in Macon from her earliest settlement and her splendid military organizations, the Macon Hussars organized in 1831, the Floyd Rifles in 1840, the Macon Guards in 1846, the Macon Cadest in 1874, the Bibb County Cavalry and Ocmulgee Rangers, were the natural outcome of such patriotism.

On the second of January 1826, the City Commissioners were elected and among the first acts of the new board was

the planting of shade trees along the sides and in the center of the streets. Many of the graceful elms and majestic water oaks that now remain to adorn the city present a pleasing testimony of the taste and wisdom of the town authorities. The suggestion and plan of setting out the trees emanated from that enterprising and most useful citizen, Simri Rose, who planted at various times many trees and urged the importance of this essential ornament to the consideration of nearly every council during the long period of his life in Macon.

Simri Rose came to Georgia from Connecticut in 1823 and settled at Fort Hawkins. He immediately purchased a half interest in the Georgia Messenger and continued with that paper until his death in 1869. He was a true chronicler of all important current local and state events. He was a natural horticulturist and florist, and devoted much of his time to the culture of flowers and fruits. At his death he was the oldest surviving member of the Macon Volunteers, and his attachment to the corps was marked. The stores and public offices were closed at the hour of his funeral. No marble column marks his resting place, but a great monument is his—the whole of Rose Hill Cemetery. This cemetery was adopted by council in 1840. It contains one of the largest plots in the state devoted to the heroes of the Confederacy.

Macon plans to be the Rose City of the South and within the last few months hundreds of new rose plants have been distributed and planted. So the name of the city's benefactor will be most fittingly perpetuated.

The first boat built in Macon for the river trade between Macon and Darien was completed 1833. A number of trips were made by a class of small crafts called mountain boats bringing from fifty to a hundred bags of cotton down the river and returning with groceries and farmers' supplies. In 1829 the arrival of the steamboat "North Carolina", whose bell was presented to the city and now adorns the triangular block, was the first boat propelled by steam

that navigated the waters of the Ocmulgee, and was hailed as a new era in the navigation of the river and the trade of Macon. There was at this time between thirty and forty flat bottom boats propelled with poles by muscular power, owned in Macon for the river trade. Freight from Savannah were three to four weeks on the pole boats to Macon, and the steamers made the trip in a somewhat shorter time.

The first railroad survey recorded in the state was the road between Macon and Milledgeville—the distance being forty-nine miles.

The Central originated from the suggestion and foresight of Dr. Ambrose Baber who introduced resolutions anent the construction of a railroad from Macon to the seaboard on October 26, 1833, for which action the co-operation of Savannah was assured. The General Assembly of Georgia granted the Central Railroad a charter on December 10, 1833, more than twelve years before the Pennsylvania railroad was incorporated. In fact, the entire length of the Central, 191 miles, was completed prior to the granting of the Pennsylvania's charter, and the Central was at the time the longest line in the world built and owned by one corporation. It was largely by Macon and Savannah money that the Central Railroad was constructed. It is a rather unique fact that it was known as the Central Railroad and Banking Company of Georgia.

A survey of the line commenced from Macon on September 15, 1836, at which time the city was growing very rapidly, but later in 1844 due to the heavy investment with no returns made by the city in the construction of railroads, Macon became bankrupt and the price of cotton declined to two and one-half cents per pound.

Virgil Powers was a member of the surveying corps and later became a state railroad commissioner. The construction of the Central commenced at the Savannah end, but the contract for building the road from Macon to the Oconee river was given to three Macon men, Robert and Charles Collins and Elam Alexander, the great benefactor of Macon

schools.

The first train on the Central arrived in Savannah in 1841 the year in which William Wadley entered the service of the road. He became president in 1856. Through his wisdom and foresight twelve roads were united into one great system under the control of the Central. His death occurred in 1882, and three years later, a handsome monument was erected at the intersection of Mulberry and Third Streets by the employees of the railroad and steamship companies of which he was the head "To commemorate the life of a good man and the ability of a great railway manager who rose from the ranks to the presidency."

The three oldest railroads in the state are today running out of Macon, to wit: The Central, the Georgia, and the Macon and Western. This will be an interesting note to observe when the City of Macon in 1923 celebrates her first centennial.

There was considerable dissension as to whether the depot should be built in East or West Macon. It was decided to erect it East Macon as many citizens thought its location in West Macon in connection with the Monroe road would be injurious to the interest of Macon and the Monroe. How strange such an idea appears in this day of railway combinations, consolidation and amalgamation! The East Macon depot was later converted into the Bibb Cotton Mill, No.2.

The eminence on which Wesleyan now stands was known as Encampment Hill and was used as a parade ground for the county militia. When this site was sold for a school the parade ground was changed to Camp Ogelthorpe at the foot of Pine Street where the fairs were then held.

The subject of female education was a live one in Georgia before Macon was even laid off. In 1835 the citizens of Macon contemplated building a seminary for women independent of the male academy and made application to the city council for a grant to this reserve for the Macon Female College. The Methodist Conference met in January 1836 and accepted the tender of the people of Macon, taking the

college under its fostering care. In this same year, the school was chartered by the Legislature under the name of the Georgia Female College. To quote from the early historian this "Mother of Female Colleges" was the first institution in the United States or the world "To burst the shackles of ignorance and superstition which had bound woman for three thousand years and kept her in the false position of a slave; whereas, she, of right, and by the command of God, should be man's equal." Consider how that first step has developed the Georgia woman of today.

The first President was Rev. G. F. Pierce. The college was opened on January 9, 1839, with 90 young ladies registered. It was an occasion of great interest and deep and thrilling excitement. A high brick wall was built around the college grounds. One square within the front enclosure was planted with flowers. The girls called this paradise. The first woman in the world to receive a diploma from a chartered female college was Miss Catherine E. Brewer, later Mrs. W. S. Benson, the mother of Admiral Benson of Macon. One of the earliest laborers in behalf of the college and who canvassed the state for two years in order to establish it, was the venerable Dr. Lovick Pierce. May 12th is observed annually as Benefactor's Day in honor of Georgia I. Seney, a Georgia Railroad Director, who lived in New York City, who was a friend of Wesleyan in her time of need, donating to the college \$125,000.00. This included the endowment of the chairs of mathematics and astronomy so long and ably filled by Dr. J. C. Hinton, the present Dean of the College.

A new charter was granted in December, 1842, and the name of the institution changed to that of Wesleyan Female College. 1917 the education of women had become so general that upon the request of both faculty and students, the term female was eliminated and it is now known as Wesleyan College.

Under the auspices of the Georgia Baptist Convention

Mercer University was founded. The school was called Mercer Institute in honor of Rev. Jesse Mercer, a Baptist divine, and philanthropist, and one of the earliest advocates of a thorough educational system. It is interesting to note that Bibb County came near being named for Jesse Mercer. The school was located at Penfield and was opened as a manual labor school in 1833. A collegiate department was added four years later and a charter granted in 1837. After eleven years experience the manual labor system was found to be inefficacious and by a resolution of the board of trustees, was abandoned. This institution was advancing in prosperity until the war, during which time the college did not suspend sessions as did most colleges. At a later period of the war a resolution was adopted tendering free tuition to the disabled confederate soldiers, many of whom gratefully availed themselves of this kind patriotic offer. Mercer has extended a like opportunity to disabled soldiers in the recent world war.

The city offered \$125,000.00 and nine acres of choice lots in a most desirable locality to the University if it would remove to this place. The faculty opened the institution in Macon, temporarily on their own responsibility in 1870, and in 1871 the trustees resolved to locate Mercer University permanently in Macon.

These have served in the following order as presidents of the institution: Rev. B. M. Sanders, Rev. Otis Smith, Rev. John L. Dagg, Rev. N. M. Crawford, Dr. H. H. Tucker, Dr. A. J. Battle, Rev. G. A. Nunnally, Dr. J. B. Gambrell, Dr. P. D. Pollock, Dr. Chas. Lee Smith, Dr. S. Y. Jameson, Dr. W. L. Pickard, Dr. R. W. Weaver.

The gallantry of the men of the old South is illustrated in the absurd incident told on an old gentleman named Danforth, an early pedagogue who taught in an academy on Pine Street. He possessed a Chesterfieldian manner so much in evidence on one occasion when his way was blocked by a cow lying on the sidewalk. He politely raised his hat, and stepping aside said, "Don't trouble yourself, Madam."

Macon is noted as a city of schools and colleges, homes and churches. Pio Nona College, now St. Stanislaus, was founded here in 1874 and Mt. De Sales Academy two years later. The Georgia Academy for the Blind was located in Macon in 1851, and originally occupied a site on the city reserve and later the site between Orange and College streets, a part of which is now covered by the Navarro Flats. In 1906 its location was changed to the beautiful site which it now occupies on the Forsyth road.

Since Macon became a city, December, 1832, she has had twenty-five mayors. Hon. Bridges Smith, the Judge of the Juvenile Court and present day historian to whom we are indebted for much of this data, served the city as mayor for thirteen years.

A number of progressive men were the organizers and first officials of the Macon Lyceum, and Library Society, which was organized the last day of 1836. Not until 1874 was the Macon Public Library and Historical Society organized. The S. B. Price Free Library, Night and Industrial School for working people, was opened in 1900. This institution is a monument to the man who was mayor of Macon for a longer period than any other person, except Bridges Smith, both occupying the office for thirteen years. The New Washington Library recently erected by Mrs. Ellen Washington Bellamy in memory of her brother, Hugh Vernon Washington, will soon be equipped and in use.

In the late forties Macon was one of the best "show towns" in America, and although it was small in population compared to its present size, all the leading companies of the world were familiar with Georgia's Central City, and loved its people. Instead of being a one-night stand as at present, Macon had the actors as its guests long enough for many close friendships to be formed between the townspeople and the players. Joe Jefferson's eldest son was born and cared for in Macon and the veteran comedian many years after, in a curtain speech at the Academy of Music, spoke feelingly of the happy memories he cherished for the

old Macon, Mayor Washington, and the ante-bellum citizens. The first theatre was on the corner of an alley below Mulberry Street on Third, an old Baptist church. Concert Hall was the next and stood on the corner now occupied by Pellew's Pharmacy. It was in Ralston Hall, which occupied the corner of Cherry and Third streets, on which the Fourth National Bank now stands, that Thalberg, the celebrated pianist, and Vieuxtemps, the equally renowned violinist, performed before a large and brilliant audience in 1858, Macon demonstrating even as that early date her appreciation of the fine arts.

Among other prominent visitors to Macon at various times were President Tyler; Henry Clay, who was given a reception in 1844; James K. Polk, who in 1849 visited the city; Millard Filmore in 1854; and Thackery, who included Macon in his lecture tour in the fifties, stopping with the Washington family at their home on the site of the New Library. He appreciated the view from Coleman's Hill, declaring it to be one of the most magnificent he had ever seen. He characterized Macon people as being polished, gentle and courteous. The visit of Stephen A. Douglas, who ran for president against Abraham Lincoln, occurred in 1860. Admiral Dewey was a distinguished guest of the city in 1900.

The Presidents of the United States were not forgotten when Macon named her streets, as Washington, Jefferson, Madison, Adams and Monroe streets now testify. Forsyth street was named in honor of John Forsyth, Governor of Georgia and Secretary of State in the Cabinet of Andrew Jackson. Tattnell Square took its name from Josiah Tattnell, Governor of Georgia in 1801-2, also United States Senator. Hardeman Avenue was named in honor of Colonel Thomas Hardeman, another famous Georgian. Cotton Avenue was an old wagon trail which was in use before the town of Macon was laid off.

Whether or not she ever becomes the permanent capital of Georgia, Macon served once as a temporary State capi-

tal. In the first part of '65 the Legislature was to meet in Milledgeville, but Sherman was on his despicable march to the sea, and rivalling in his destruction the Germans' devastation of Belgium, Milledgeville was on the line of march. Therefore, Governor Joseph E. Brown and the members of the Legislature met here in our City Hall for about a month; in consequence Macon was the capital of the State during the month of February, 1865.

The old barrel factory on the Central Railroad at Crump's Park represents a magnificent building erected by the Confederate Government as a laboratory for the manufacture of small ammunition, but Wilson entered Macon and prevented it being used for this purpose, and it was confiscated by the Union Government.

The first telegraph message ever received on the end of a man's tongue was taken by Mr. John C. Butler, the magnetic telegraph operator, who used that innovation out on the Columbus road when he cut the wire and sent in a request for supplies and had no receiving instrument. Mr. Butler was the first operator in the United States to receive a message by sound, as previous to that time the Morse alphabet of dots and dashes was printed on paper tape, which method is now only used to receive stock quotations.

In 1880 Macon is referred to as a "stuck-up village" by its small neighbor, Atlanta, at which time the lighting was by gas. It is said that the man who went around just before day to put out the lamps on the street corners carried a lantern to find the lamps. No soft drinks, no vaudeville, no movies, then! Can you realize that where the City of Macon now stands with her miles of well paved streets and shady parks, beautiful residences and substantial business houses, with her eight railroad radiating to every point of the republic, was a hundred years ago an unbroken wilderness without a trail and no white man within its borders.

No history of Macon would be complete without at least

a mention of three famous statesmen, Judge L. Q. C. Lamar, Senator A. O. Bacon and Judge Emory Speer.

The ladies of the Macon History Club, which was organized in 1890, have been keen in their appreciation and realization of the fact that no matter how glorious a promise the future may hold for our community, that promise can never be fully realized at the expense of an unremembered past. They have treasured with a miser's greed but with a vestal's holy care each shining grain of Macon's golden dust. They feel themselves to be the keepers of Macon's immortality.

And in the march of progress they will not permit to lie unremembered and forgotten, those men of past generations whose vision and accomplishments are responsible for the present beautiful city in which we live.